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LINCOLN

CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY
FEBRUARY 12, 1911

THIS APPRECIATION OF
LINCOLN, WHICH IS RE-
PRINTED BY PERMIS-
SION OF "THE DETROIT
NEWS," WAS CONTRIB-
UTED TO THAT PAPER,
FEBRUARY 12, 1909, BY
W. J. CAMERON, OF
BRIGHTON, MICHIGAN.

7011 35.

LINCOLN

Lincoln is the chief saint in the nation's calendar. Often as his natal day comes round the national mind is slowed to reverent mood. Our memory of him walks apart in paths of subdued reflection, for we behold him as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Here is no bold and valiant figure, with sword and buckler and stirring trumpet call, marching across his time to the acclaim of hosts; here, rather, is one from whom men hid their faces, whose countenance was woe-struck, who walked wearily his appointed way through the bitterest wine press of redemptive blood ever trod by man, save One.

Lincoln's whole life lingered in a minor key which through four years rose to a wail, and at the end sank into a miserere. If certain great works of literature are said to have scriptural quality, his life did show a scriptural movement. Like Moses he was nurtured with shepherds and husbandmen, and trained in those simple virtues which bear the strain of weightiest events. Righteousness was burned into his heart as the color of the sun into his skin. He came out of the west like a prophet, those choosing him knowing not what great thing they did—"it seemed too rash, on a purely local reputation, to build so grave a trust in such anxious times." His freedom from the common, pleasant faults of men was not surpassed by any devotee; he was sound to the core of his great heart. Like the spokesman of the moral law he stood before the people in times that allowed no state secrets, in a tumult that demanded daily account of what he did and what he thought, yet he stumbled not at all. He left one speech that will live with Isaiah's rapt prophecy, and at the end he laid down his life as a final sealing testimony of his faith. Surely he is our saint, and we do well to reverence him.

Abraham Lincoln lives not by what he did, but what he was.

LINCOLN

"Here was a type of the true elder race,
And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face."

Intellectual giants do not wring tears from after generations. Military genius does not send us to the closet of tender meditation. Yet these are the influences of Lincoln's life, and they can have no source other than majestic moral strength and simple human tenderness. It is not by accident, neither by man's design, that we commonly think of Lincoln as inhabiting an exalted place—like Moses on the mount—where visions came to him and he made his vows familiarly to the Almighty as his best Advisor; it could not be otherwise with one for whom the higher laws were more clearly written than the statutes on the books.

Military genius we acclaim; intellectual superiority we boast; but character we reverence, and it were an unmeant profanity to hail Lincoln with screaming eagles. It was not military genius that accomplished Lincoln's work—consummate tacticians and brave warriors were admittedly with the other party. Intellectual power did not make up his strength—the argument was with the other side. But it was the moral straightness, clear, spiritual seeing, absolute trust in the uncompromised and unentangled Right that made the outcome what it was. Behind the battle plan was Abraham Lincoln's conscience, behind the far flung line of blue was Abraham Lincoln's conviction, and this is the true basis of his fame.

Simplicity and righteousness are the keys to Lincoln's life. One is not certain that the last could have existed without the first yet it was the last that made the first possible. Abraham Lincoln's surpassing clearness of vision in our most trying emergency was due to the simplicity in which he approached a problem. Philosophers had found so many considerations on both sides that they were mere weather vanes.

LINCOLN

Theologians lent their texts to the most opposite views. Politicians found themselves helpless in the mire of expediency. Forth came Abraham Lincoln asking: "Is slavery right? Is secession right?" Philosophy had its involved answer, theology its prosy homily, politics its evasions. Abraham Lincoln answered his simple question in the only way it could be answered, and for him the battle was over. He had only to go forth in his serene conviction, conquering and to conquer. He dared to be simple. He dared to ignore the entangling mazes of thought afraid of its own conclusions. He found the line between right and wrong, and took his stand to await the turning of the nation on his principle as on an axis. We little men dare not be simple. We cover our consciences with layer on layer of compromise and concealment. We ask, "What will this involve?" The speed with which the answer comes to the question, "Is it right?" unhorses us. We crave something more deliberate, with easy gradations, something that enables us to postpone taking our stand until the multitude is ready to stand with us. The complexity with which we have covered the questions of our individual and national life is our mantle of cowardice. Dare be simple and complexity vanishes—thus was Abraham Lincoln given his clear sight.

When Abraham Lincoln determined what was right the battle was over for him—with us it is only begun. Between seeing the good and doing it is the battleground for most of us. But the perception and the act were inseparably linked in Lincoln's character. He dared venture on the Right. He dared trust all that he was and all he hoped to be on it. That was his faith, that his religion, that the ground for his intimate thought of God. He seemed to SEE the operation of the moral law; he seemed to KNOW that it revenged itself on whomsoever violated it. His faith was an inner sight. To him the Right was neither philosophical,

